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THE RISE OF THE MUSICAL PROLETARIAT

By RUDHYAR D. CHENNEVIÈRE

SINCE art is the expression of humanity crystallized in style, its development ceaselessly and closely moulds itself upon the evolution of human civilization. The forces which transform society at large are identical with those that preside over the convulsions of art: social revolutions and artistic revolutions are merely different facets of the same actual happening, complementary effects of the same collective desire struggling, along converging lines, for the same ideals of human regeneration.

This analogy exists not only in the domain of the psychic, showing forth in changes of sensibility collective and individual, impelling the creator to seek new roads; it is a law as well in the domain of the material and social. For art, and music in particular, is dual in its manner of manifestation: it embraces creation and execution, the psychic and the social phase. It is this second phase which we will here consider, leaving the creative phase for later study.

Music has thus far received but little attention from the social point of view; and this view-point forces itself more urgently on our attention in these days, when social and material problems have assumed so great an importance. Just as the exertions of battalions of economists have been necessary to establish the material history of humanity, perfecting, if not altogether replacing the entire sentimental historical structure of official instruction, rich in glorious deeds and splendid and picturesque personalities; so the efforts of numerous students of "musical economy" will be needed to define the material history of music.

In this article we will try to lay a few foundation-stones for such a study, without for a moment pretending to completeness. And we have no intention of establishing this material conception of musical history at the expense of an individual and creative concept. The two conceptions are not opposed—they complete each other. One can no more define the evolution of music purely in terms of spiritual values than one can explain it by the sole

use of social ones. Only a study of the operations and reactions of these two currents of power can give us a synthetic grasp and understanding of the question, and enable us to enter into the complex workings of these forces in contact.

The complete realization of a musical work takes place, as we have already remarked, in two distinct moments: the moment of creation and that of execution. The first belongs to the composer, the second to the executants. The very first question that comes up is this: May these two moments be expressed in one and the same being, or does their expression inexorably call for two series of individuals? At first glance, the answer to this question may seem a secondary matter. In reality it decides the fate of all music. Wherever the two phases of musical realization are identified with two different individualities the interposition of an *intermediary element* between these two individualities becomes a necessity. This element is *notation*, notation in the broadest sense of the word.

Without doubt the problem of notation is a material one; nevertheless, it is the vital focus of every musical system, and its very reaction on the musicianship of the creator himself is of capital importance.

In fact, no matter how sublime may be the music conceived by its creator, if he cannot communicate it to the executant (let us dispense for the moment with the problem of instruments) by means of a medium *clear, precise* and *complete*, all his sublimity amounts to nothing; is condemned to malformation and mutilation; in other words, is totally destroyed, for there is no "somehow good" in art.

In that case what should this intermediary be in order to comply with these conditions of perfection? Which forms should this notation assume?

The first to suggest itself is the *oral* form. The creator, in the presence of the executant, by means of voice, gesture, explanations of nuance and movement, by a kind of personal suggestion, impenetrates the receptivity and intelligence of the executant or executants with what he himself has felt and conceived.

This process supposes that the creator himself be to some extent an executant and, in short, it limits prodigiously the broader irradiance of his music, confining it to the personal relations established between creator and executants. To remedy this limitation, memory is brought to bear upon it. The executant repeats to another executant what the creator has taught him; this second executant repeats his lesson in turn, and music flies

from tongue to tongue, from mouth to mouth. This method of transmission may be clear and complete; yet surely it is not precise. Quite unavoidably, in the transfer from individual to individual, the music changes shape; to the extent, perhaps, of becoming quite unrecognizable.

Another form of notation is possible, the *ideographic* form. Here each sound has a corresponding sign, a symbol, and music may be written like a language, in score. *Like a language!* Is music a language? Is it an intellectual thing, symbolic, perhaps; yet rational? Truly, these are questions to be weighed seriously. More, since it is scarcely possible to have a sign for each sound (in fact, the number of possible sounds is illimitable), it becomes necessary to select certain sounds for notation, and leave the rest to chance, or to indicate them in some vague manner—which almost makes compulsory the disuse of the sounds not noted, and ties down the musician to the employ of a certain fixed number of sounds, classified so as to form tone scales.

Thus in order to be practically useful, ideographic notation must necessarily be inexact and incomplete—more, its intrinsic tendency will be to reshape the very essence of music itself. For music is the art of sound, and has no mission to reject certain sounds, in principle, and to give others the right of citation—at any rate where simple sounds are concerned, sounds unadulterated by harmonic accretions. Certain musical compositions may be restricted to the use of a fixed number of sounds, sounds which, with regard to each other, have established certain sympathetic or complementary relations; but other pieces will have to use other sounds, and it will not be possible to say: "This particular sound does not belong, musically." In nature every sound is represented; and music should virtually comprise them all; not that this means to imply that they should all be used at the same time; quite the contrary.

Innumerable schemes of notation have been invented, which try to avoid the fatal weakness of every system of ideographic notation. The Oriental notations, the notation of ancient Japan in particular, seem to have realized the sum total of possible perfection, utilizing symbols regarded as guiding-marks, which varied with the various melodic modes, and were united by indefinite curvilinear signs, which in a manner schematized those intermediate inflexions of the melody defying notation. Of this notation traces still remain in the early plain-chant.

But this species of notation, well-nigh perfect, can only be applied to very simple melodies. The complication of polyphonic

parts ensuing in European music necessitated a simpler system of notation, that is to say one more indeterminate and intellectualized. This system at once brought about (at the same time with other conditions, which we will investigate later) a most radical impoverishment of occidental music which, *qualitatively limited, was thrown back upon tonal quantity* in order to gain a diversity of expressive power ever more ardently coveted.

In order to escape from this intellectualist notation, a kind of mechanic notation of music (which Bergson might have termed the cinemetographic transcription of the vital evolution of music), the phonograph offers possibilities as yet scarcely investigated. In fact, thanks to the phonograph, notation may become *immediate*, no longer *indirect* (with an intellectual medium) as in the notation we actually use. Nevertheless the phonograph, a "reproducing" instrument, demands a fundamental "execution"; and thus we return to the original oral transmission, and to the composer-executant; yet, instead of relying on tradition, or on the transfer from individual to individual, the phonograph makes certain the absolute preservation of music as regards time and space, and very greatly facilitates its propagation. Thus we have briefly analyzed the principles of the various schemes of notation which are possible, and have indicated their character and their defects. The successive appearance of the different modes of notation is not due to chance; but is the logical result of the development of music and civilization in general, which brought about a tremendous change in the condition of the executants.

If we hark back to the beginning of Aryan civilization, we find first of all, that music is closely allied to poesy, the two forming species of magical or religious incantations, or modulated recitations recounting heroic or divine exploits. In consequence, the two phases of musical production (creation and interpretation) were merged as closely as possible. In most cases the musical line was improvised by the reciter, the bard, in accord with certain fixed modulations. In every case the executant is the actual composer, either creating the music altogether out of his own consciousness, or amplifying, according to his emotional impulse, the folk- or magic-themes, which in those days passed from mouth to mouth.

The bard travels from village to village; very often he begs his way. Since in the eyes of the primal crowds he is the messenger of the gods, he is everywhere well received, and thus wanders about the world, causing simple souls avid for beauty pure and direct to weep with joy and ecstasy.

In the same period religion is centralized about the family hearth. The father of the family is the priest, sacrificing to the gods; conferring with the ancestral spirits; singing hymns to the elements (Vedic hymns, for instance). These hymns and songs principally originated through pure intuition or love of nature; sometimes they were composed after more or less carefully preserved initiatory reminiscences.

The families group themselves in hut-clusters, in villages, in cities. Religion becomes more definite, takes on organization. Priestly colleges are established, temples rise, the hearts of the cities, wherein sacred mysteries are celebrated. These ceremonies unite poesy, dancing and music: ritual art is constituted.

And while the descendants of the bards still wander through the land, through the countries of the world, at times in groups of three or four members, always following their old half-improvisational principle, music develops in the bosom of the temples, borrowing executants from the religious bodies, in most cases the monastic ones.

Music now having become a part of one great homogeneous whole, may no longer be abandoned to the whims of improvisation. Every sound has a symbolic value, an occult relation with the spoken words and the forces they evoke. Based on a learned arithmology whose last vestiges Pythagoras has disclosed to us, there rises a musical system profoundly subtle, with numerous modes, corresponding to the divinities under whose auspices its psalms are chanted.

At once the necessity of an exact, symbolic notation becomes apparent. Numbers, letters, sounds are regarded as analogous. Each letter has its corresponding number, its corresponding sound in a certain mode. Hence notation uses the letters as guiding-marks, and the temple traditions correct whatever may be too antique or too abstract in this notation.

Henceforth the executant is separated from the creator. The creator creates a religious system in which music is an element. He is the great spiritual architect. The domain of *material* realization is *taboo* to him because of the very fact. He is the soul directing the organs. These organs, musically speaking, are the executants, choristers or instrumentalists.

A common faith unites them, as well as worship of the supreme pontiff who, so far as they are concerned, is the representative of the divinity. Their singing is prompted by divine love. To this end, in most cases, they are dedicated from their birth. Art, for them, is the adoration of God, the act holy above all others. They

are truly the organs of a single body until they die. Whatever their sketchy and occult notation may fail to furnish is given them by their faith. And this faith, this belief, remains as immutable as the majestic temples in which it is enshrined. The creator has become more than a superman: he is a religion, a faith, a god! And the executants live in this faith, sing in this faith, commune with this god in never-ending prayer. Thus the abyss between the creative and the executive phases of music is not as yet disclosed. It seems to be a mere crevasse covered with earth. Yet before long the earth will give way and the yawning gulf appear. Music will issue forth from the temples, and be polluted by the contacts of the street.

Little by little the temples have ceased to be the hearts of the cities; dozens of smaller hearts have commenced to beat within their walls. The theatre rises to confront church and temple. From that moment on music and art have contracted a mortal malady, from which they will not recover until that day, centuries later, when a new faith is born.

The executant, formerly a creator, then a religious celebrant, has become an artisan. Soon he will be a proletarian!

Leaving the temple behind him, the executant loses all sense of tradition and yet—he must have music. Folk-song, the song of the people, offers but a meagre vein for exploitation. Therefore, he is obliged to tap the sacred lode. Here he is confronted with a decidedly incomplete notation, devoid of meaning once it is disengaged from its traditions. The need of a more exact system of notation makes itself felt, a more exact, that is to say a more intellectual system. Ignoring tradition, ignoring ecclesiastical training, he loots the song treasures of the church, and mingles what he has pillaged with the barbarous melodies of the people, which turn monotonously upon a few sounds. It is then that the supreme crime is committed. The notes of the scales are used as genuine ones; *modes are confounded with tonalities*. (This subject will be considered in a later article).

The individualism of the Renaissance codifies the accomplished fact. And, later, the age of reason perpetrates the ultimate sacrilege by imposing the “tempered” system.

In the meanwhile the medieval cities grow larger. The theatres increase in number with the multiplicity of princely and royal courts, eager to make a show of their wealth and luxury in supporting organized theatrical or musical companies. The bards, who have been metamorphosed into troubadours, have now acquired a fixed habitation. Married and fathers of families,

they have become the creators of chamber music. Mr. Everyman is now a troubadour. The level of music declines, it sinks ever lower, lamentably lower; while virtuosity makes its appearance on the world's stage.

The nineteenth century begins. Princely and royal courts lose their prestige; and before long the tidal wave of capitalism sweeps beauty—already much diminished—out of existence. The orchestra, an enlarged combination of chamber music units, swells and swells. Berlioz and Wagner at length shape it into a body of titanic proportions. The little cities have turned into great metropolises, and national centralization has drawn inward, toward the capital, all the creative forces of the nation. Centralization and machinery! such is the order of the day. These factors create the great orchestras as well. Finally, these factors develop a new class: the wage-earning proletarian. Have we not in music “the orchestra musician, the *café* musician, the hotel musician”; the paid maker of music, ready to play at a moment's notice, scraping the catgut at so much a yard of up- and down-bows?

Confronted with an artistic shamelessness such as this what can the creator do? Should he turn to quantitative effort, since quality is no longer possible of attainment? Should he exaggerate the detail of his signs of notation, his shadings, his tempos, his rests, since the executant is no longer anything but a machine devoid of personality, or a mere virtuoso suffering from gangrenous enlargement of the *ego*? What happens? Music, cut in machine lengths, completely loses the intrinsic vitality without which it is no more than a fleshless skeleton: it turns into an intellectual game, and amounts to no more than that.

Thus the evolution of society has decreed. With every new extension of the social volume, the abyss separating the creator and his interpreters has widened, the need of an exact system of notation has increased. And this has ended with the characteristic triumph of the pianola.

The ordinary pianola thus marks the extremest limit of the antimusical which humanity has ever witnessed, and which humanity probably ever will witness. But with it there is a feeble glimmer of something in the distant horizon, something which may well be the far away annunciation of a newer day. *The machine which has slain music, perhaps, in the near future, may become the means of its redemption.*

The dawn of a new civilization glimpsed amid the blood and horror of material and moral wars, terrible convulsions of a gigantic labour, would seem to promise, before long, reactions affecting

music; and a spiritual regeneration, based on the mechanic factor, on the machine, is drawn along the sky-line in contours as yet lacking precision.

Two elements will contribute to this renascence on the material plane: *the phonograph and electricity*.

The phonograph, owing to its character, is led to play the same part which in the Orient is played by the oral transmission of music. Both these means of propagation call for an initial rendering, that is to say, either a composer-executant, or an executant in touch psychically with the composer. Now, while oral transmission inevitably misshapes this initial rendering, the phonographic record sempiternally and at every point offers every executant a true image of the mother rendering. There is no further need of an intellect notation, the record is the matrix in which every rendering should be melted—or, at least, may be melted. Should the executant wish to modify the work while rendering it, he shoulders the entire responsibility; he may at once be confronted with the original interpretation, with the evidence of the senses.

Yet we do not regard the phonograph as chosen to replace the executant; as we see it, the psychic and magnetic vibration of the executant is a factor which may not be withdrawn from an art-work without emasculating it. The phonograph takes the place of the score. In the same way that a musical work of the present day is not really completed until it has been written out (and in truth, it is only half completed then), so to-morrow it will not be looked upon as finished until it has been phonographed; *and its graphic notation altogether suppressed*. Instead of our using our eyes in order to play, we will use our ears—unquestionably a more logical procedure.

Nevertheless, the phonograph has its definite limitations. While it is able to present an exact rendering of a simple melody or of figures that are not elaborate, it seems incapable of ever clearly reproducing orchestral polyphony.

Yet, is the orchestra itself destined to survive? Here and now I venture to answer in the negative. The orchestra, with its continual need of expansion, can no more continue to exist on its present proletarian basis than society in general. What must be done? First, it must be centralized, and then diffused. "Do not sweat the man, sweat the machine," an English manufacturer recently declared. We say: The players who make up our orchestras being already machines, in the majority of cases, let us courageously admit the fact; and in place of attempting to retard

let us accelerate the new departure. Let us create machines sensitive to the extent of vibrating at the slightest melodic inflection. Let us create electric organs which will bear the same relation to the organs actually in use, that the harmonium of the village church does to the great modern recital instrument. Above all, let us create machines which *have no keyboards but levers manipulated by hand* (or else sliding keyboards), which will thus be able to give us *all* sounds, which after a long scientific study, once again will enable us to comprehend the difference between a mode and a tonality. At the present time the string instruments are able to mark the distinction; yet the players are only able to do so instinctively; and at that, either their instinct is lacking, or else is warped by the piano. Their instinct, therefore, must be revitalized (which will take two or three generations to accomplish) by means of the electric machine, which can give the exact number of vibrations desired, and which makes it possible to impose the true intervals upon the ear, and thus bring the sense of hearing back to nature again.

Instead of the orchestra the future, then, will disclose to us an ensemble of four or five great electrical instruments (possibly on the order of Dr. Cahill's Telharmonium, the Choralcello and others) representing certain great tone families, and corresponding to the orchestral divisions of the present day, the wood-winds, brasses, strings, etc.; and which, without any question, will reveal to us a wealth of possible sonority beyond all our present concepts, simply because, owing to the illimitable combinations possible in number and proportion of harmonic means, the composer himself will be able to play these instruments, identical in their mechanism. The interpretation will be set down with absolute exactness on paper rolls (the principle of the Duo-Art, Ampico, etc.), and in consequence, every executant need only copy exactly—plus his personal vibrations—the composer's interpretation. There will be not a single rule to which the executant will not take exception with full knowledge of the fact. And the intellectualist system of notation, with all its defects of inadequacy, will find itself supplanted.

Undoubtedly these machines will cost a great deal; yet quite as certainly no more than the support of an entire orchestra does to-day. For a long time they will remain imperfect; yet of necessity, thanks to electricity or some other natural force which the future, perhaps, will reveal to us, they will attain such a degree of sensitiveness that they will reflect human vibrations as well as a harp- or violin-string. It is merely a question of exactness.

Were a few millions to be devoted to research in this connection, a solution would soon be found.

If we have laid stress on these ideas of the future, it is because they stand for the *one and only solution* of a terrible problem. The music of to-day is built up on nothingness, on mortuary fragments. It is absolutely out of the question to get out of the social blind alley (to put it logically) in which every musician finds himself at the present time, unless we look the situation straight in the face, unless we anticipate the only reasonable way in which to blaze a new path for ourselves.

The composer can no longer exist without prostituting his art: nor can the orchestra conductor, unless he exhausts himself with labours so herculean that they make him a machine. The public pays a madly exorbitant price for all these concerts, of necessity poorly arranged in order to comply with the need of satisfying all, and which content none. The result is chaos. It may be truly said that the musical world reflects the social world. The same human evolution also has brought about this general revolution—and an evolution cannot well be halted. There are some farsighted beings who anticipate and outstrip evolution itself, and such alone deserve to be called “men!”

(Translated by Frederick H. Martens)